

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study *More Than Enough* these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

**Introduction:** I remember seeing a series of “Peanuts” comic strips where Lucy was wondering why we were put on this earth. Charlie Brown offered a suggestion: “to make others happy.” Lucy later told this to her brother Linus. He replied, “Really? I guess I should start doing a better job. I’d hate to be sent back!” I don’t mean to sound cynical, but if we were put here to make others happy, then I’d say many of us are failing in that purpose. I’ve been in ministry a long time, and I learned a long time ago that it’s impossible to keep everyone happy all the time. When you have to make hard decisions, it’s inevitable that you’re going to make some people unhappy. We live in a fallen world, and the simple reality is we can’t please everyone.

Surely our God has put us here for a greater purpose than making others happy. The Bible says He put us here to glorify Him. True, we often fail in that purpose, and that’s one of the reasons God sent Jesus. Not only did He pay the penalty for our sins with His death on the cross, but He also enables us to live productive lives for God here on earth. We glorify God when we abide in Christ. This raises a very obvious question: what does it mean to abide in Christ? Jesus explained it in the fifteenth chapter of John’s gospel.

## I. An illustration of abiding in Christ.

- A. Jesus used the illustration of a vine.
  - 1. The Old Testament sometimes used a vine as an illustration of Israel.
    - a. Psalm 80:8-6 compares Israel to a vine that was taken out of Egypt, planted in Israel, and then destroyed by God.
    - b. The prophet Isaiah compared Israel to a vineyard that yielded nothing but bad grapes (Isaiah 5:1-7).
  - 2. Jesus, by contrast, is the “true vine”.
    - a. Unlike Israel, He is without sin.
    - b. He bears fruit for God, and enables us to do the same.
- B. He said His Father is the “husbandmen” (or “vinedresser”).
  - 1. He takes care of the vine.
    - a. He removes unproductive branches.
    - b. He prunes branches to make them even more productive.

- I have a lot of trees in my yard, and every now and then I have to prune them. That means I cut away branches that get in the way of the tree's growth. In the same way, God has a way of removing things from our lives that prevent us from being our best for Him. It's often a painful process, but necessary.
2. What does it mean to "bear fruit"?
    - a. Works that indicate true repentance (Matt. 3:8).
    - b. Good works as a result of following Christ (Matt. 7:20).
    - c. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

## **II. The necessity of abiding in Christ.**

- A. We must abide in Christ just as a branch abides in the vine.
  1. A branch cannot bear fruit in itself.
    - a. If you cut a branch away from a vine, the vine may continue to bear fruit, but the branch will wither and die.
    - b. Just as a branch literally draws life and strength from the vine, we draw spiritual life and strength through Christ.
  2. What exactly does it mean to abide in Christ?
    - a. The first step is trusting in Him as your Lord and Savior.
    - b. It means to seek His guidance and strength day by day.
    - c. It means obeying Him.
- B. What happens to those that do not abide in Christ?
  1. Branches that do not bear fruit are cut away from the vine.
    - a. A branch severed from a tree might still be good for something. The wood can be salvaged for some purpose.
    - b. A branch from a vine is only useful for burning.
  2. How does this relate to the doctrine of eternal security?
    - a. Those who fail to bear fruit do not lose their salvation because they never really had it in the first place.
    - b. We can only bear fruit by trusting in Christ. Our security depends not on us, but on Him.

## **III. The results of abiding in Christ.**

- A. Our prayers are answered.
  1. Why do some prayers go unanswered?
    - a. Sin in our hearts.
    - b. Wrong attitudes.
    - c. God has a better plan.
  2. When we abide in Christ, we seek God's glory above all else.
    - a. This enables us to pray according to God's will.
    - b. It enables us to accept God's will when we don't get what we want.
- B. The Father is glorified.
  1. People see our good works and glorify God.
  2. People are drawn to faith in Christ.

**Conclusion:** Some people have the idea that if you abide in Christ, your prayers will always be answered as you wish and you will have a life free of hardship. That simply is not true. The apostle Paul was probably the godliest man in the New Testament apart from Jesus, but his life was filled with hardships, and his prayers were not always answered (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Because he abode in Christ, though, he was able to accept God's will. He could live with his "thorn in the flesh" and other hardships because God's grace was sufficient.

Many of us remember the big scare over Y2K. As the year 2000 loomed near, people predicted that computers all over the world would crash and mass chaos would result. It turned out nothing significant happened (the computer I had at the time was not "Y2K ready", but all I had to do was reset the date and it was as good as new). However, if I'd known what that year was bringing me, I'd have probably run and hid. I was going through some trials in ministry at the time, and in the midst of it all, my sister was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Her health grew worse over the next several months, and on January 3, 2001, God took her home to heaven. Just three months after that, my Dad passed away. Then another sister and her husband separated. It seemed like one thing after another was happening to my family.

As I look back on those days, I can't say what God's purpose was in all those hardships, but I can say this: His grace is sufficient. He doesn't guarantee life will always go smoothly, but He does guarantee He'll be with you through it all. When you abide in Christ, He enables you to enjoy life with all of its hardships. When others see the joy in your life, God will be glorified.

*Ken Jones is pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, VA. He is a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Martin and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. His wife, Celia Carroll Jones, is an associate professor at Hampden-Sydney College.*